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CC: Dan Trimble, Economic Development
manager

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To the Burien City Council;

Katie Trefny, Communications officer

CITY OF BURIEN

Attached you will find three articles that I would encourage Council members to read. They deal with the topic of Re-branding and Economic Development. I am unaware of what research materials the City Staff and Re-branding Consultant have provided to the Council for educational purposes. Hopefully this does not duplicate what you have already received but rather provides further insights into the process.

These articles provide case studies as well as suggestions for the more likely ways to make Re-branding a possibly positive and profitable experience for a given city.

Some of the suggestions for success that the three authors provide are;

1. Bring the correct Stakeholders to the table that know the **distinct qualities** that make that city unique. This means that the **Stakeholders** that should be included are those at live (residents) and do business (actual businesses) in the city. While a few outsiders from the city may be included for reality perception checks, it is those that are really invested in the city that know it best. Gather as much information from these sources as is affordable and possible. Don't relegate the process to sticky notes on a sheet of paper that say very little.
2. The Rebranding Committee should be made up of those **Stakeholders**. A question that the Council needs to ask is whether those real **Stakeholders** actually make up the Burien Rebranding Committee right now? If not, make some adjustment right now.
3. As one of the article author's states, "Rather than rejecting their actual selves, cities need to embrace- but update who they are. Adopt best practices to be sure, but also be true to the native soil...." Perhaps, some of the Council need to have a preview of what might be coming down the road rather than to have it sprung as a surprise of what the logo might be and what the slogan might be. Perhaps a Beta Testing of possible logos and slogans might be a good and cautious idea rather than rolling out ones that make sense to no one.
4. Lastly the real energy for Re-branding comes from the business owners and residents of the community. If the right **Stakeholders** have not been included and they have no ownership in the final results, the Re-Branding will not be successful. But the consultant still gets to go home with the paycheck and leaves the city with an unsuccessful product. And know that there is no quantitative research that shows that Re-branding makes a difference for a city. The energy for Re-branding must come from within.

As the majority of the City Staff does not live in the city or own a businesses in the city, it is imperative that the real and involved residents and business owners (**Stakeholders**) be represented on these committees. The Council should ask who are the Stakeholders that have been invited in and are they the correct ones? They are the ones who know and embrace the authentic character of Burien. Burien needs, "To thine own self be true."

Respectfully,

C. Edgar

Are Municipal Branding Campaigns Worth the Price?

Brand marketing promises new attention -- and money -- to cities.

BY RYAN HOLEYWELL | DECEMBER 2012

For the last 12 years, Don McEachern has been traveling the United States and making a relatively simple pitch to city leaders coast to coast. For a modest sum -- typically somewhere between \$80,000 and \$200,000 for a medium-sized city -- he can help improve a city's image, contributing to gains in tourism, economic development and citizen pride.

Many of his clients are places you've probably never heard of and will probably never visit, like Brookings, S.D.; Walton County, Ga.; and Goshen, Ind. But if McEachern has his way, once acquainted with them, you'll never forget them. McEachern's Nashville-based North Star Destination Strategies is one of the leading firms in the field of place branding, a specialized type of marketing that promises to help tell a community's story by drawing on lessons learned from market research, focus groups and surveys. In short, McEachern helps cities develop their brand. Call it their essence, their character, their spirit -- whatever it is, a brand, McEachern explains, "is what they say about you when you're not around."

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The field has its skeptics. Critics of place branding say McEachern and his ilk are selling a false promise. A city's brand is developed over years by its policies and its amenities, and a glorified marketing effort can't change that, they argue. But advocates for place branding say services provided by firms like North Star are so integral to the success of a city that

it's nearly impossible to compete without them.

Ultimately, does place branding really work? That depends on whether you trust McEachern. He insists it does. But he's also the first to acknowledge that he has almost no proof.

Every city is trying to capture a little bit of the branding magic that has helped put some of America's best known cities on the map. Many are associated with catchy slogans -- not necessarily developed by city governments themselves -- like "Keep Austin Weird" or "What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas." Other places have an instantly recognizable nickname, like the Windy City, the Motor City or the Big Easy. Those in the branding community say that while a slogan or motto is part of a

brand, they're more concerned with projecting a broader image of a community, like the reputation Portland, Ore., has as a haven for independent-minded hipsters, Santa Fe's position as a destination for those embracing Southwest arts and culture, or Miami's role as a place for sun, surf and nightlife.

But most cities aren't Portland, Santa Fe or Miami. The vast majority of America's small and midsize cities don't have much of a reputation very far beyond their borders. That's where branding consultants like North Star and its competitors come in, pledging to help communities distinguish themselves.

North Star officials speak at events run by groups like the National League of Cities and the International City/County Management Association. The firm distributes information about successful campaigns to potential clients, and its efforts have been well documented in local newspapers across the country. So when city leaders decide to pursue branding, McEachern says, "people think of us."

The typical product provided by North Star and other companies includes a logo, a slogan and a broader message or narrative about a community, as well as a list of steps that should be taken to help spread that story. "I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard 'small-town charm with big-city amenities,'" McEachern says. "That might be extremely relevant about a place, but it's not the least bit distinct."

If a community has done a particularly good job at identifying and understanding its brand, it won't just serve as a marketing tool. Rather, it will actually be used to guide decision-making, almost like a citywide mission statement. Advocates for the process don't shy away from emphasizing how important they believe developing a brand to be. A report by the group CEOs for Cities says branding can help repair a city's image problem and raise awareness of what makes a city a good place to live. It goes so far as to call branding the foundation of what makes a place desirable. "A city is not Coca-Cola," says Alison Maxwell, deputy director of economic development for Glendale, Calif. "It's a living, breathing, amorphous entity. Good branding can bring the sum of the parts together and give you a hook to hang your identity on."

You've likely never heard of Petersburg, Alaska, pop. 3,000. The tiny town about 110 miles southeast of Juneau sits on a coastal island that's only accessible by boat or plane. With snowcapped peaks towering over a quaint harbor, it's a picturesque Alaska fishing town -- which doesn't make it all that different from many of its neighbors.

So last year, in an effort to distinguish itself, Petersburg hired North Star for the full branding treatment. (Since landing Sumner County, Tenn., as its first client in 2000, North Star has provided services to about 180 communities.) The firm conducted a series of focus groups, interviews and surveys of stakeholders, residents and Alaskans from other parts of the state. The data revealed some interesting aspects of the city. Its best assets, research found, include its reputation as an authentic town not inundated with tourists like other Alaskan coastal communities, and the fishing industry in Petersburg is well known and respected. Petersburg is also unique in having a deep-rooted Norwegian culture. While residents overwhelmingly said

they'd recommend it as a place to visit, they weren't as enthusiastic about recommending it as a place to live. Ultimately, the city's historic lack of messaging meant many Alaskans -- even those living near Petersburg -- weren't that familiar with the city. While obstacles like high transportation costs weren't helping Petersburg get visitors, neither was its hesitancy to be its own advocate.

The key to a good brand, McEachern says, is linking up research with an authentic message that resonates. North Star concluded that while Petersburg can't claim the distinction of being Alaska's best fishing village, it could own the title as Alaska's best Norwegian fishing village. That, North Star says, works to the city's advantage because it plays into the town's reputation as industrious and hardworking. North Star -- as it does with all clients -- boiled it all down into one sentence known as a "brand platform" that's meant to be the driving force behind all the city's messaging efforts: "For those seeking adventure and independence, Petersburg is at the heart of Southeast Alaska on Frederick Sound, where the fishing culture is distinguished by a strong Norwegian heritage, so your hard work and pursuit of authenticity are rewarded."



Little Norway. Big Adventure.

In addition to developing a logo for the city (featuring six fishing ships) and a new slogan ("Little Norway. Big Adventure."), North Star suggested some other ways the city could spread the brand. McEachern typically proposes strategies beyond traditional advertising, largely because he works with cities that don't have big budgets for major ad campaigns. For starters, North Star told Petersburg to inventory all things "Norwegian" about the city -- festivals, foods,

traditions -- and highlight them. It also recommended developing an online community calendar, a citywide Flickr account (followed by a photo contest), an endurance race through area trails and online job listings -- all to generate buzz about the town.

The firm designed signage for the airport and harbor, and directional markers around town that feature Petersburg's new logo and color scheme. It offered suggestions for content and design of a new website, print advertisements and trade show booths. It gave ideas for merchandise to be branded with the new city logo, like workboots and fleece jackets. It provided city leaders with words they should use in written materials and even in conversation to spread the brand, like "authentic Alaska," "small-town feel" and "adventure." It even suggested a new way for city staffers to answer their phones that plays up the Norwegian angle: "Velkommen to Petersburg."

The city and affiliated entities are using the new logo and slogan on business cards, stationery and websites. A new public library will include a totem pole that incorporates Norwegian designs, per North Star's recommendation. A recent promotion with Dodge Ram at the Alaska State Fair offered fairgoers the chance to win a free trip to Petersburg. The chamber of commerce is scheduled to have a booth at the upcoming Seattle boat show in January. The community is even planning on advertising in Alaska Airlines' in-flight magazine. "I couldn't believe the number of people who came up to me and told me 'I'm so excited about this project,'" says Liz Cabrera, coordinator of the Petersburg Economic Development Council. "It was almost like the horses got let out of the corral."

Skeptics may wonder why Petersburg needed to spend \$75,000 to get consultants to travel 2,500 miles and confirm that the Norwegian fishing town is, in fact, exactly that. But McEachern says that in the case of Petersburg, his company's value is in providing insight on how the city should convey its message, as opposed to the message itself.

Still, skeptics contend that at a time when cities are struggling financially, it's irresponsible to spend money on amorphous branding campaigns that don't provide a concrete return on investment. Many have also questioned whether a process originally designed for corporations can work for a community. A 2006 paper on city branding by a pair of Danish professors noted that city branding campaigns tend to be bland -- and thus fail to stand out -- thanks to the manner in which they're developed. Cities are diverse places: In order for a brand to see the light of day, it needs buy-in from a broad group of stakeholders. So while the intent of place branding is to emphasize what makes a city unique, the messages that come from branding efforts can sometimes be anything but that. "The result may appear well meant," the researchers concluded, "but the remarkable and catchy will elude the branding effort."

Indeed, while Petersburg gave North Star a lot to work with, other communities offer greater challenges. Some slogans developed by North Star -- like "Bring Your Dreams" for Brookings, S.D., or "Yours Truly" for Lee's Summit, Mo. -- could probably be used in any city in America. Steve Arbo, the city manager of Lee's Summit, a Kansas City suburb of 91,000, says that there was some skepticism when that slogan was first revealed. "There are those that said, 'This is a waste of money and you could have paid me \$75,000 to come up with "Yours Truly,"'" Arbo says. But he dismisses those critics as people who "don't have a full understanding of what we're trying to do." The slogan is part of a broader message that emphasizes Lee's Summit as a place that values community.



Critics also wonder why an outside consultant is even necessary. Glendale, Calif., for example, finalized a branding campaign led by North Star last year. The city didn't have a bad image, says Maxwell, the deputy director for economic development. It just

didn't have much of a reputation at all. Ultimately, the city and North Star selected "Your Life. Animated." The intent is to highlight Glendale's position as home to DreamWorks Animation, the studio behind animated movies like "Shrek" and "Kung Fu Panda," and Walt Disney's Imagineering, which develops components for Disney's theme parks. The phrase has a double meaning meant to convey positive feelings about the city beyond the industry. "It gives you something we can talk about," Maxwell says. "It helps everyone coalesce around an image and sense of self."

Dave Weaver, a retired engineer who serves on the Glendale City Council, says he's not convinced the city needed to hire an outside consultant. "I said, 'You've come from the East Coast, and you want me to tell you about the town I was born and raised in so you can tell me how to brand ourselves?'" He says the effort could have been done internally, or the city could have used creative types from the area. "Let the entertainment people come with their ideas," Weaver says. "It's in their own backyard."

City officials would be better off focusing on concrete improvements they can make to their communities, some have argued. "I said from the beginning: If you want to change the image of the city, change the city," says Steven Holzman, a city commissioner in Boynton Beach, Fla., which spent about \$15,000 on a branding campaign. "We have areas that are blighted. There's trash strewn. The landscaping needs to be replaced. We don't have sidewalks and curbs on major streets. You can tell people all you want about how beautiful it is, but when they drive and see it with their own eyes, it's not as beautiful."

That kind of criticism isn't unique. North Star's own Petersburg report, for example, notes that the city faces serious hurdles: a declining population, a lack of higher education opportunities and few entertainment venues to attract new, young residents. It's hard to imagine a branding campaign reversing all of that. Scott Doyon, a principal with PlaceMakers, a firm that specializes in urban planning and marketing, says cities undergoing branding campaigns risk advancing a message that's too aspirational and not rooted in reality. The best plan, he says, is to try to leverage positive qualities -- not dupe people. "Cities already have a brand whether they've done anything to cultivate one," Doyon says. "They tend to get the most respect if they can find a way to leverage that reputation."

Still, Holzman wonders if the relatively small amount of money that his city and other midsize communities spend on branding will have much impact, considering that they don't have the resources to spend millions of dollars on advertising campaigns that will get lots of eyeballs. If they can't go all out, he reasons, then what's the point? But McEachern counters that his efforts give cities the power to get the smartest use out of the limited dollars they've already budgeted for marketing.

Sometimes -- for reasons that can't always be anticipated -- branding efforts flop when they're first rolled out. When Oak Park, Ill., revealed its new logo, bloggers suggested it resembled a stylized phallus. Critics of Dunwoody, Ga.'s new logo, which featured sky-blue text and a large neon asterisk, said it was remarkably similar to Walmart's. And Colorado Springs faced a double dose of criticism. After committing \$111,000 on a branding project, city officials didn't get the reception they had hoped for. Its slogan, "Live It Up," was panned as generic and unoriginal (it turns out Battle Creek, Mich., had used the same one), and some said the logo looked like clip art.

"You spend months working on a strategy, and people say 'Show me the logo, show me the tagline,'" recalls Doug Price, president and CEO of Colorado Springs' Convention and Visitors Bureau. "We got to the end, and when we announced it was going to be 'Live It Up' ... everybody's a critic. People say, 'How did you come up with something that stupid?'"

Colorado Springs ultimately kept the slogan. Price is a fan, noting its double meaning ("It's an attitude and it's an altitude"). But it still responded to the criticism of the logo with a redesign contest and wound up with a new logo that was vastly more popular. "My advice is to pull the tent flaps back as far as you can and get as many people involved," says Price.

In the end, the most critical question is whether branding matters. Experts in the field say that, to an extent, its return on investment can be measured by social and economic indicators, job creation numbers, tourist trips and opinion surveys of the brand itself. Indeed, the New Mexico Tourism Department, which recently launched a multimillion dollar "New Mexico True" campaign, says it's so critical to measure the ROI that it's budgeted for a consultant to study the ads' impact.

Still, it can be difficult to measure the true return, since indicators like jobs don't change in a vacuum. Ask a new resident whether the "Yours Truly" campaign helped convince her to move to Lee's Summit, and she'll probably say no -- even if the campaign really did play a role -- since marketing done well is subtle. "I've been asking people all over the country if anyone's ever moved anywhere or even spent a vacation somewhere because they had a great logo and a line," McEachern says. "Nobody's raised their hands."

Cities may not be able to point to specific effects of a branding campaign, but in many cases, McEachern says, a new brand will infuse existing city efforts with new energy. "There are so many variables at play, there's no clean return on investment on this, and if anyone tells you there is, they're selling you something. There simply isn't."

Arbo, of Lee's Summit, says he knows the campaign on its own won't prompt people to move to his city or open businesses there. But he hopes -- and expects -- that it might be enough to get people to give Lee's Summit a second look. "The rest," Arbo says, "is up to us."

Images courtesy of North Star Destination Strategies



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If Cities Want to Succeed, They Need to Focus on What Makes Them Distinct

Many municipalities struggle to identify their uniqueness and instead try to market themselves for having things that you can find anywhere.

BY AARON M. RENN | SEPTEMBER 2014

Have you ever noticed that while every company tries its hardest to convince you it's different and better than its competition, every city tries its hardest to convince you it's exactly like the coolest cities?

This is easiest to see in marketing videos put out by various chambers of commerce and convention and visitors bureaus. If you happen to watch one that isn't of your own city, you will immediately be struck by how generic it is and how it tries to sell you on a list of purported amenities and attributes we'll label "conventional cool." A list that includes things such as coffee shops, bike lanes, trendy fashion boutiques, startups, microbreweries, skateboarders, silk-screen-print posters, hip restaurants, tattoos, public art and so on.

Chances are your city or state's local marketing material has more items on that list than not. Yet these things are ubiquitous in America. Does anyone really believe there's a place of any size left where you can't get a decent cup of coffee or where you don't see tattoos?

These attributes may all be great, but they don't set a place apart in the market. They don't show us something distinctive about a place -- and being distinctive is important. As Harvard business professor Michael Porter puts it, "Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique matrix of value."

There's nothing wrong with bike lanes. Bike lanes are great. But bike lanes are the civic equivalent of what might be called "best practices" in the corporate world. They are things every well-functioning city is now expected to have. They don't, however, generate differential value or make a city any more competitive in the market. Just as you can't build a successful company on simply a collection of best practices, it's hard to build a successful city just on these things. You need them, but they aren't enough. They are the new urban ante -- just table stakes.

If we think of the places that have the greatest resonance in the public mind, it's generally those places that are unique. People visit New Orleans or Las Vegas because no other place is like New Orleans or Las Vegas. There's no place on earth like New York or San Francisco. If there's nothing unique about your town, then your town is just a commodity. And we know that commodities compete on one factor: price. Being a commodity player leads to weak marketplace leverage. That's why firms are always trying to differentiate themselves in a marketplace.

Cities fall into the conventional cool trap for a lot of reasons. Part of it is the play-it-safe mentality produced by politics. Anything different is sure to bring naysayers out of the woodwork. Even well proven items like bike lanes or bike shares can produce hoards of crying NIMBYs.

In a dynamic era, cities can also want to market that they are abreast of the latest trends. This is something even corporations fall prey to. During the dot-com era, for example, many firms appended a ".com" to their logo. Neiman Marcus even had "Neiman Marcus.com" printed on its shopping bags.

Another reason cities get stuck is that many struggle to identify their uniqueness. Or, more tragically, reject it as obsolete. Both are terrible mistakes.

I'm convinced that pretty much every place has a unique character. It might be hard to articulate, but it's there. In Midwestern places like Ohio, there's always a struggle to articulate identity. But visit Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus, and it's instantly apparent these are three radically different cities. Places just need to do a little anthropological work to unearth their distinctiveness, distill it down and then imbue that "mojo" into everything they do.

Doing that requires enough self-regard to embrace authentic character. Too often, as with a high school student transitioning to college, identity is put away into the attic like so much "little kid's stuff" that's not part of the new aspirational identity. That's a bad move.

A city that's getting it right is Nashville. The Music City could have turned its back on country. But it didn't; it embraced country music as core to its current and future identity. It even updated the scene for the 21st century. It's not your grandad's AM radio country anymore. Yes, Nashville embraces that music and those people as part of its heritage, but today it's glitzier, more Hollywood. Today, it's "Nashvegas," as some call it.

Rather than rejecting their actual selves, cities need to embrace -- but update -- who they are. Adopt best practices to be sure, but also be true to the native soil. A great city, like a great wine, has to express its terroir.

As with the Apple ad campaign, cities need to be willing to "Think Different." And the difference they need to embrace is the reality of what they are as a place. As the Greek oracle put it, "know thyself." Now, live out that reality.



Aaron M. Renn | Columnist

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Should Economic Development Focus on People or Places?

Cities tend to favor building stadiums and convention centers over investing in education or human services. It's an understandable but troublesome trend.

BY AARON M. RENN | MARCH 2016

There's a raging debate about whether the focus of our economic development efforts should be on people or on places. That is, should we make investments in people, hoping to see them succeed regardless of where they end up? Or should we focus on investments in particular cities, towns and rural areas in order to bring jobs and growth, thus helping the people who live there?

Many in the know think that the focus should be on people. Rather than trying to resurrect struggling locales with various speculative endeavors, they think we should invest more in things like education. I myself have critiqued the place-based economic development strategy of trying to stop the so-called brain drain.

Most local government leaders, however, seem uninterested in people-based strategies, at least insofar as they are seen as ingredients in economic development. These leaders tend to prefer place-based approaches such as stadiums, casinos and convention center projects that so often are panned as boondoggles.

Even if this may be less than ideal from a theoretical perspective, it is understandable. After all, localities are inherently place-based entities. One thing that makes a local government distinct from a corporation or other organization is its status as a territorial entity. Cities and towns can expand, but it's rare that they ever get rid of territory once they've acquired and incorporated it.

A city's territory is much more tightly bound to it than its citizens are. People can move. They can choose to affiliate themselves with another town. But cities cannot exchange one geography for another.

This produces some bad incentives. For example, the fiscal liabilities of a locality attach to its territory, not to its citizens. So voters have every incentive to pull the lever for politicians who will minimize costs in the present at the expense of the future. Politicians can sign bad union deals with future pension promises that are hard to fulfill. They can go into debt to spend money now.

But the citizens who voted for those politicians can then simply move to another town, often to a suburb (or a different suburb) within the same region, to avoid paying off those debts. In many cases they don't even need to change jobs. It's like being able to run up big debts on a credit card in someone else's name. If cities were people-based entities and the debts run up during the time citizens lived there followed them wherever they went, we'd surely see much more fiscal sanity.

Given their fundamental territoriality, however, cities can never really be people-based entities in that sense. Harvard economist Edward Glaeser, an advocate for policies that are first about people, is realistic about the choices facing local policymakers. As he put it in an article for *City*

Journal, "No mayor ever got re-elected by making it easy for his citizens to move to Atlanta, of course, even when that might be a pretty good outcome for the movers themselves." In other words, we should understand that local leaders will always be place-focused. It's inherent in the job.

For their parts, state and federal governments need to recognize and shape the right oversight and incentive structures around localities to account for this. First, this would mean reducing incentives for local governments to rack up huge debts and liabilities. While I am a strong proponent of greater local autonomy in many areas, there should be strict state oversight to prevent the accumulation of excess debt or unfunded liabilities by local government.

Second, state and federal place-oriented aid should, as often as possible, be directed to relieving burdens rather than to speculative "build it and they will come" endeavors. Rather than subsidizing real estate projects and the like to try to restart growth, another approach to fiscal stabilization is to deal with some of the major liability issues directly.

One example is combined sewer overflows. In many older cities, both stormwater runoff and sanitary sewage flow through the same pipes. In heavy rains, these can overflow into local waterways. Under the Clean Water Act, cities and sewer districts are required to substantially eliminate these. But that can cost billions of dollars. For the most part, this will fall on the citizens living in that service territory in the form of higher rates.

If aid were directed to helping pay for these costs instead of going to more speculative projects, this would hold down utility rates that hit low-income people the hardest, and it would contribute to improving the cost profiles of these places that have driven people to the suburbs or out of the region entirely.

States and the federal government, by changing incentive structures and helping localities that face true place-based challenges, can hopefully produce an environment in which the focus of local leadership shifts toward the more people-based endeavors, such as education and other human services.



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